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FM AMCONSUL KARACHI

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0574

INFO RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 0042

RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 0172

RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 0238

RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 1753

RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE PRIORITY 2553

RUEHPW/AMCONSUL PESHAWAR PRIORITY 4436

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY

RUMICEA/USCENTCOM INTEL CEN MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KARACHI 000471

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SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/11/2018

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SUBJECT: SINDH - DISTRICT NAZIMS CONCERNED OVER FUTURE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT SYSTEM

Classified By: Classified by Consul General Kay Anske for reasons 1.4 b and d.

¶1. (C) Summary: During a July 21-23 visit by the Consul General (CG) to upper Sindh province, four district nazims told her that they were concerned about dissolution of the local government system by the new Pakistan People's Party (PPP) led government. The nazims, all members of President Musharraf's Pakistan Muslim League (PML) party, expressed continued support for his leadership. One nazim told the CG that, should the current government fail, Musharraf should be returned to power and allowed to oversee a caretaker government until the country can install a new democratically elected government. End summary.

¶2. (C) The Consul General meet with the District Nazims (locally elected district officials) of Sukkur (Nasir Hussain Shah), Shikarpur (Arif Khan Maher), Khairpur (Pir Syed Niaz Hussain Shah), and Ghotki (Ali Gohar Khan) during a July 21) 23 visit to upper Sindh province. All four nazims, members of the Pakistan Muslim League (PML) party, were concerned about the future of the local government system in Pakistan, which allows for local election of district and sub-district leaders. All of them expressed support for fellow party member, President Pervez Musharraf.

Concern Over PPP Plans for the Local Government System

¶3. (C) Sukkur Nazim Nasir Hussain Shah told the CG that he was concerned about recent talk by the federal government, dominated by members of the rival Pakistan Peoples' Party (PPP), about abolishing the local government system. He acknowledged that the system was in need of change, but opined that the PPP was simply maneuvering to oust PML elected officials, who currently make up the majority of elected district nazims.

¶4. (C) In a separate meeting in the city of Ghotki, Khairpur Nazim Pir Syed Niaz Hussain Shah and Ghotki Nazim Ali Gohar Khan voiced strong concerns about PPP attempts to eliminate a system they claimed "had brought revolutionary change to Pakistan." They described frustration among PML elected officials who "allowed" elections to occur and then accepted their outcome (in which PPP won the majority of seats from Sindh to the national and provincial assemblies) but have felt betrayed by the PPP since. Both called for more devolution of powers to the district government.

¶ 15. (C) The Khairpur Nazim complained that the new government had reduced funding to the local districts and opened a number of corruption inquiries into the operations of these districts, without uncovering evidence of any misappropriation of funds. He felt this scrutiny was distracting and uncalled for, particularly by representatives of parties that, he said, were "thrown out for corruption" in the past.

¶ 16. (C) At a July 22 meeting, Shikarpur Nazim Arif Khan Mahar voiced concern about a large number of school employee vacancies that he said the provincial government has been slow to address, only recently lifting a ban on filling the vacant positions. Mahar concurred that the local government system needed reform, but not outright abolition. For example, he felt that that district governments should have control over the police in their district, in order to effectively address security issues.

Distrust of New Government

¶ 17. (C) During a private meeting with the CG, the nazims of Khairpur, Sukkur, and Ghotki expressed unbridled frustration with the new PPP and Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) (PML-N) coalition government. They declared that this government has overseen the worst economic decline "since independence (from the U.K.)," causing foreign investors to leave Pakistan. The three nazims claimed that the PPP and PML-N have used a confrontational approach to stifle opposition.

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Support for Musharraf

¶ 18. (C) The Khairpur Nazim described the situation in Pakistan today as "alarming," due to the declining law and order situation, which has adversely affected the economy, and declared that Musharraf was the only true leader in the nation. He called for USG involvement in and funding for GOP operations. The Nazim stated that if the current government fails, the only solution would be to establish a caretaker government lead by Musharraf for one to two years before attempting to install a new democratic government.

¶ 19. (C) Comment: All four nazims, members of Musharraf's PML party, are clearly at odds with the new PPP-led government. This dissatisfaction likely comes as much from being removed from the corridors of power after nine years as from disappointment with the new government's performance. Nevertheless, the nazims that the CG met with are all wealthy and powerful overlords with enormous influence in upper Sindh. Anske